



Advent meditation 24 by Father Robbie Low

ADVENT XXIV

A few years ago some Christian hymn book publishers decided to publish hymns which included the Divine Name – the tetragrammaton revealed to Moses at the Bush of Fire, namely YHWH. This was historically, Hebrew being bereft of vowels, expanded (mere guesswork) into ‘Yahweh’ or, if you are a follower of the JWs – JEHOVAH.

The outrage in the Jewish community eventually led to the Vatican banning such offense from any Catholic publication.

Why the fuss?

Well, let’s go back a bit. To the desert of Midian in fact when the fugitive adopted Egyptian/Hebrew princeling, Moses, encounters the mystery of the fire that announces the Presence but does not consume. In response to the call of this extraordinary power Moses, understandably wants to know who is speaking. In Hebrew culture to know a name is to be privy to that person and their company. Moses wants to know who is calling him and what he shall tell his people. The answer will revolutionise the religious understanding of Man. From the polytheistic creations of the human imagination and the projections of fallen man onto the nature of the godhead, we are suddenly swept into the glory of monotheism and the utterly ‘other’ of the divine. This is not a god of something (war,love,harvest,storm,hearth etc) but THE GOD – the only

God, the origin and end of all things, the Almighty, the Eternal.

The answer echoes down the history of Man.

'I AM WHO I AM' - here is the declaration of the essential BEING – the first person singular of the verb 'to be' – without whom no-thing is.

Fast forward to the theocratic state of Israel/Judah and the Temple. It is the job of the great High Priest once a year, on the Day of Atonement, to enter the Holy of Holies, the place of the Shekinah, the glory, the Presence with the offering and, if he survives the encounter, to come out to the assembly and pronounce the sacred name. Only him, only then, only once. YHWH. In all other dealings, worship, encounter the people of God use 'Adonai' –Lord. Indeed, to this day a Jew will not even write the word GOD but he must do thus:- G-D.

We may think this excessive BUT it is surely one of the Commandments which still obtain and by which we live that we should not take the Name of the Lord in vain. Our discipline is not as extreme as our elder brothers in faith but it is a necessary discipline nonetheless. We may note that the further our society and civilisation gets from God the more it abuses/misuses the divine name. The tidal wave of blasphemy that pours out of the media is abhorrent. 'OMG' – O my God- is used as a kind of punctuation to trivial conversation. 'Jesus' reduced to a mere exclamation mark.

It is all part of the gratuitously insulting culture that has reduced deference to the divine to employing the sacred as a swear word.

We know the Divine Name. We understand its holiness and its power. We employ it in prayer with affection, reverence and care. To hear it abused is more shocking to the faithful than any amount of secular 'f...ing and blinding'.

When people, as they often do in our presence, hastily substitute a blasphemy for a secular swear word, it is a good opportunity for evangelism. I always try to explain why, though I would wish for neither, I much prefer obscenity to blasphemy. Because my Lord has vouchsafed His Precious Name to Man and you must know the One of whom you so casually and dismissively speak to be the Eternal Lord of all. Then, knowing Him, you may indeed call upon Him in devotion and faith and love. You may know the fire that burns but does not consume and the way into the Holy of Holies and the Presence of the 'I AM' –who is our origin and our end.

Spiritual exercise: Eliminate the misuse of the Lord's name and be bold to explain to others why it is more offensive than any casual obscenity.